

Plymouth Congregational Church of Fort Wayne, UCC

March 27, 2016

EASTER

“Because You Live, O Christ”

“Mary came to the tomb and saw that the stone had
been removed ...

John 20:1

PRELUDE

We have worked our way
through the season of Lent and
the worship of Holy Week;
we have traced the heightened drama
of Jesus’ last days and hours:
his arrest and abandonment,
and the agony of his death,
and the reports of his burial.
And we have come to this Sunday,
to share in the great mystery
Christians have proclaimed through the ages:
Jesus Christ - risen from the dead! Alleluia!

It was just two weeks or so ago
that a great gospel music talent was lost;
Daryl Coley, who had battled illness for
twenty or more years, died at age 60.
One of his more memorable songs
that sits at the top of my playlist is
“When Sunday Comes.”

**When Sunday comes,
my trouble gone,
as soon as it gets here,
I’ll have a new song.**

**When Sunday comes,
I won’t have to cry no more,
Jesus will sooth my troubled mind,
all of my heartaches will be left behind;**

when Sunday comes

(Daryl Coley, 1955-2016; “When Sunday Comes”).

This morning, let us consider:
When Sunday comes.

Not just any Sunday, but Easter Sunday,
for it is this Sunday that puts all Sundays
in perspective.

When this Sunday comes,
as it came for Jesus,
 all that is broken gets left behind,
 and all sadness fades and sorrow
 is washed away.

This Sunday, Easter Sunday,
proclaims the recreational powers
 of God.

This Sunday, Easter Sunday,
defines the vast dimensions of God,
the farthest reaches of the Deity
 we worship,
the insurmountable heights and
incomprehensible depths
that Divinity will go for life to rise,
to triumph over death and its dominions.

When this Sunday comes,
we become a people who live
in the words of Walter Brueggemann,
under **“the threat of life,”**
for in spite of the world being afflicted
with **“derangements and distresses”**
(Albert Schweitzer), and though we are
beset with troubles seemingly beyond
 any power of our own to rectify,
the rule of God breaks through,
 meddling with death,
stirring earth and bidding her children
 rise into life.

Indeed, this Sunday we are invited to
be awake and alert to the ultimate
desire and design of God, it being
in the nature of God, in the

**“character and purpose and
faithfulness of God”
to “make all things new”**
(see Brueggemann, *The Threat of Life*, p.147).

Isn't it all so wonderful and glorious?

I hope we aren't too weighed or jaded,
so dulled by low expectation of church
and the imposition of its inertia,
that we be denied Easter's thrill.

You may recall the story of
the Sunday School teacher
working with a group of children -
who shared the sacred story:
Jesus being rejected,
crucified and buried,
placed in a tomb sealed with a large stone,
and how the stone was rolled away
when Jesus rose.

The teacher proceeded to ask:
**“Do you know what the first words
were when he came out of that tomb?”**
Which is, let me say, a very important
question.

A little girl in class jumped up,
waved her hand excitedly,
and shouted out: **“I know, I know!
I know what Jesus said!”**

The teacher called upon the little girl,
“Good, please tell us what Jesus said.”

The little girl, with chin up, arms extended,
exclaimed: **“TA DAHH!!!”**

Yes! **“TA DAHH!!!”**

Christ is risen.
And with his rising,
he is free, loosed, with us;
with his rising, we see his

life validated, worthy to honor,
worthy to continue in our lives,
worthy to incorporate in the
time that is ours.

Easter is not a day for the timid or tepid.
God schemes resurrection into our lives.
God has placed us under threat of life -
which is why we hope and pray to be
awake and alert - and here, for good;
we never know when life might strike,
and we find ourselves -
not as spectators, but as spectacles,
having a “ta dahh” moment of our own,
such that we be transformed, changed,
for good.
in a way only God alone can see.

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This morning, I want to work with
the theme of resurrection schemes,
and how God-with-us is working for our good.
I offer this in hope that we better understand,
that we might anticipate,
resurrection dimensions in our faith.

**RESURRECTION FAITH UNFOLDS;
IT IS A CREATIVE IRRITANT URGING US
TO GROW IN THE FAITH**

First, resurrection was revelation
that slowly unfolded, that quickly was grasped.
Slowly unfolded - quickly grasped.

It is clear from the biblical record that
furious activity surrounded the death of Jesus,
and then the discovery that his tomb
had been unaccountably emptied.

According to the fourth evangelist (John),
Nicodemus (who we first encountered in chapter 3)
and Joseph of Arimathea (John 19:38)
had stepped forward to tend

to the burial of Jesus with what time they had. This followed traditional burial rites, men prepping the body of men, and women would have been expected to prepare the bodies of women. And curious, isn't it, not one of the storied twelve in sight. Jesus always has friends beyond our sight.

John's gospel then speaks of Mary venturing to the tomb where Jesus had been laid, and upon discovering it empty, she flies into a panic - running off to tell Simon Peter and the beloved disciples, both of whom then go running to the tomb, racing really. Then Peter goes into the tomb, then the other. The beloved is said to have seen and believed, but even though - and the text is clear here - "as yet they did not understand the scripture" that Jesus would rise. To see and believe and not understand. This is all part of our sacred story on Easter.

And then, the wonderful encounter with Mary Magdalene, who speaks with Jesus - wanting so much to find Jesus, who is standing right there in front of her. Insight comes when Jesus speaks her name, "Mary." Then, whatever scales were working to impair her sight fell; she could then go to proclaim to the brothers: "I have seen the Lord."

What we see condensed in John's text is the resurrection of Jesus slowly unfolding, but being quickly grasped. The "Ta Dahh" moments are variously portioned out, but then quickly grasped.

The Easter challenge this poses for us? That we be committed to growing in our awareness and understanding of resurrection schemes in our midst. We are a people who promise to grow in faith. It is part of our baptismal liturgy, and the promises we publicly vow. To grow ... that we might help and further the mission and ministry entrusted to

our care as a Christian church.

Now, pause with me here.

“Sin,” so said Gregory of Nyssa, “**is ultimately a refusal to grow.**” It is a state in which we can become lodged as individuals;
it is a state in which an institution,
the church, can become ensconced,
stale, stagnant, tired, with no “ta dahh’s.”
This sin - the refusal to grow -
is a deadly sin.

When we become so entrenched in an outlook,
so certain and sure that what we see is all
there is and all there ever will be,
that’s when we wither and shrivel and die.

So Easter comes as an irritant to
stir and spur us on, that we might
discharge our Jesus work.

When Easter comes,
we experience a renewal of thought,
mind, spirit.
We revision who we are and what we
are to be about.
We begin to see:
we are not under threat of death.
We are under threat of life, trusting,
hoping, working, praying for Jesus love
to work wonders in us and in our world.

**RESURRECTION FAITH EMPOWERS,
BRINGS COURAGE FOR US TO
RISE IN REVOLT**

Another Easter thought.
When this Sunday comes, it
comes with a surge of courage
for us to contest the powers of death.

Woody Allen:
“**I’m not afraid of death.**”

**I just don't want to be there
when it happens."**

Our lives are never fully free of fear.
What Easter brings as a gift of grace,
is a reassessment of our fears,
and a surge of courage to lead
committed lives that honor Jesus love.

(Jurgen Motlmann, *Theology of Play*, p. 14)

"... resurrection faith means courage to revolt
against the 'covenant with death'" (Isaiah 28:15).

**RESURRECTION FAITH ENLARGES OUR HORIZONS,
BRINGS WITH IT A FRESH
PERSPECTIVE, A NEW WAY OF LOOKING
AT THE WORLD - AS WELL AS THOSE IN IT**

A final thought.

When this Sunday comes,
we obtain a fresh perspective, a
new way of looking at the world.

There is a hymn composed by Shirley Erena Murray,
a New Zealander, included in our *New Century Hymnal*
under the title: "Because You Live, O Christ" (No. 231).
She said of her verse:

"The creative irritant to write ... came from outdated
words in our parish hymnbook ... (*NCH Companion*, p. 327).

Resurrection comes to update our outdated ways and words.
It always brings fresh perspective, new ways of devising life
for goodness and peace in the world. It comes as a huge
surprise, possibly even falling in love -
with God, with Jesus, with the world Jesus loves.

Shirley Erena Murray writes:

**Because you live, O Christ,
the rainbow of your peace
will span creation,
the colors of your love will draw
all humankind to adoration.**

We need such vision. We need such generosity of spirit. We need such hope. And it all comes as part of the package - when we are surprised with having fallen in love with the world God loves. In this resurrection scheme, the threat of life exempts no one.

May we grow in our awareness and understanding of Easter.
Under the threat of life,
may we live in hope and expectation,
that as Christ lives,
so also shall we live, til our own
"Ta Dahh," and the great exchange of
faith for the everlasting life.

Amen.

*(Sermons are typically composed in haste,
for the demands of the day are many;
so be charitable as you read; and remember:
the contents of this sermon have not been edited
and may or may not have been a part of its public presentation)*